

II THE ROLE MODEL

Jama'at Ulema-e-Islam's Senator Hafiz Hussain Ahmed tries to explain to Azmul Haq why religious parties have started losing in elections

Hafiz Sahib, isn't the decreasing number of your party's seats in assemblies signalling the 'law of diminishing returns', I mean JUI(F) seems to have been heading towards political extinction?

Your statement does not reflect reality. This impression is being created in the media as part of a planned strategy against the religious parties. The Constitution of Pakistan gives an assembly a life-span of five years but nowhere is it mentioned that a Government once elected shall last five years. Regrettably every time a government is sent home, the assembly is also dissolved.

This is a cruel way to treat an institution. Contesting elections has become the profession of the very rich. JUI is an ideological party. We do not have feudal or industrialists funding our elections. Our workers are awarded tickets on merit and the party men run our campaigns. How often can you expect a poor party, its ordinary workers and its candidates to match the might and riches of the feudal or industrialists. Once in five years is okay, but if elections are held every two years, not only JUI but all ideological parties and workers are bound to get eliminated. This is a good way to ensure the 'survival of the richest'!

You mean frequent elections are the only reason for this downfall?

No! There are other factors too. When Gen. (Retd) Beg declares that Younas Habib's mega-crores were used in the elections, then you can't help wondering about 'other factors' too! Naturally, the 6 crores used by Gen. Beg in elections was to get some favourites 'in' and keep others 'out.' I am on record for having raised this matter on the floor of the Senate.

Is that why you lost your Quetta-Chaghi seat in 1990's election?

Precisely! I was approached by Maj. Aurakzai of the ISI before the elections. In fact, he visited me in Quetta along with a superior and wanted to know whose side the JUI would take if our main leadership won. They obviously did not like my open support for Jatol, who was then COP leader. Our conversation ended on a sour note when I turned down their request to switch allegiance to Nawaz Sharif. I knew then that the fate of my election was sealed too. I was a comfortable winner in 1988's elections. In '90, I was made to lose by the proverbial 'hidden hand'. I feel this type of interference has done no good to our country.

All major COP leaders in the '88 Assembly were made to lose in 1990's elections. Maulana Fazal, Nawabzada Nasarullah, Begum Abida Hussain and Khan Wali Khan were kept out to ensure that Nawaz Sharif took over as the PM instead of Jatol, without much resistance.

Then Benazir Bhutto was right all along. She called 1990's elections rigged from day one.

As a political worker, I feel that the way assemblies have been dissolved and the Government kicked out is quite undemocratic. We have to learn to find political solutions to political problems. The assemblies and Senate must be used to find ways out of dead-locks. It is about time that parliament start deciding the fate of the Government instead of the Aiwan-e-Sadar doing so.

What was JUI(F)'s role in the political crisis of '93?

We sincerely wanted a political solution to the mess. Maulana Fazlur Rehman—our parliamentary leader—and Maulana Sherani tried their best to make better sense prevail.

Why did you join the tri-partite alliance with the PPP and Junejo League in NWFP in '93's elections?

JUI's poor workers can easily handle the rich and mighty of PPP, Nawaz League or ANP, but what do

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you do when there is an eight-party alliance to compete with? One has to look at political realities objectively and apply the best options available. Let me also clarify here that the tri-partite alliance was in fact more of an adjustment than an electoral alliance.

How did this alliance help you? Political observers feel it proved disastrous for all concerned. Your strength in the assembly has been reduced to just a member.

Nawaz Sharif ditched us in 1990, despite that JUI(F) was a major component of the COP. The electoral adjustment in 1993 was not on the national level. Our local leadership weighed the pros and cons before getting into it.

JUI used to be one of the biggest political forces in the '70s. It formed a coalition government in the province in 1973 with Maulana Mufti Mahmood as its head. With just a member in parliament can you call your move wise?

I agree with you there. The tri-partite alliance, in this respect, looks a bad move. It was in fact in reaction to the Nawaz League. Against his arrogance and ungratefulness, I do not think any of the three component parties benefited from the alliance.

It is commonly said that JUI(F) got into this alliance only to ensure that Maulana Fazlur Rehman won back his seat, without which the maulana stood no chance!

The maulana had won this seat in 1988. This is Maulana Mufti Muhammad's traditional stronghold, he defeated Mr. Bhutto on this seat in 1970's elections. But 1990 was different. It suited the Nawaz League and its mentors to keep the maulana out of the assembly and therefore the contest was so arranged that Pakistan People's Party's Mr Kundi won.

Let us not forget that both Sardar Fateh Mohammad Mohammad Hasni who defeated me in Quetta and Mr. Kundi who won against Maulana Fazl in Dera in